



Travertine Tidbits

Notes from Chickasaw National Recreation Area

A press release last week from the National Park Service's Washington, D.C. office regarding yet another "analysis" of declining visitation in all national parks over the last five years, prompted us at Chickasaw National Recreation Area to look at our visitation trends. Here is what we found:

- Visitation at CNRA has declined at approximately the same rate as for all units of the national park system - a decline of one percent.
- That is, until 2006, and year-to-date visitor attendance has increased 10% at CNRA! Other national recreation areas in Texas and Colorado are down by as much as 25 % for the same period.
- Speculation regarding the reason for the nationwide decline, not only in national parks, but state parks, considers a number of factors:
- These factors include rising gas prices, fear of rising gas prices, more venues to spend leisure time such as home-based entertainment, resort packages, theme tours and parks, poker tournaments, casinos, special interest competitions, and a multitude of spectator sports.
- Yet all explanations are speculation, as no definitive study has been conducted. At Chickasaw NRA, we think we can tie some declines over the last five years to closures due to ice storm recovery, repair to main roads such as the Perimeter Road, partial closure of campgrounds due to construction of new sites, personal watercraft ban for two years, and weather. When it rains, visitors stay at home. When the temperatures top 100 degrees, visitors go to the mall. Burn bans and high fire danger keep people at home. And sometimes our traffic counters break and skew the attendance figures before we know it!
- We believe that a very warm spring brought visitors out in unprecedented numbers in April and May, boosting our year-to-date numbers.
- But we really don't know why the trend is down overall, but up for the year. We are a part of a national decline in outdoor recreation. However, our "virtual visits" on the internet have gone up.
- Despite the heat, despite gas prices for the SUV, the RV, and the boat, during the 4th of July weekend, Chickasaw NRA hosted 47,000 visitors!
- We do know that day use of the park is larger than it has been. More folks are here for a day, using the lake, the picnic facilities, swimming, hiking, riding, boating, and fishing. Visits to the nature center were high during the holiday weekends and attendance at ranger guided programs is up for the year.
- We do know that CNRA is blessed in having Lake of the Arbuckles and Veterans Lake at near-full levels. They are spring fed by the

aquifer, while other lakes in the region are drying up. Even with the severe drought, Travertine Creek continues to run, and the swimming holes are full every weekend.

- **Is quality or quantity the goal?** Quality of experience the visitor has at CNRA will always be a priority. It is our mission to preserve the quality of the natural and cultural resources and to assure a safe and enjoyable visit by the 1.3 million visitors to the park each year. Holiday weekends test us all when we exceed capacity. The park seeks ways to cooperate with other local attractions and the tourism association to increase visitation during the week. Local residents know that a quality visit can be had any mid-week day! So in that respect, we **can** accommodate a quality visit for many more visitors seeking an outdoor recreation experience close to home if we can entice them during the week.
- **You can check out visitation statistics for yourself at:**
www.nature2.nps.gov/mpur and sign on as "guest".

Chickasaw NRA, along with all other units of the national park system, will be shifting to a new national-based web site system in late August. The new web sites will be more user friendly, have expanded menus, and should help visitors plan their trips to national parks more efficiently. (Maybe this will help with visitation trends and help us spread visitation out over the week!)

- The new format will include a search function, so key words can be typed in with a more direct link to the topic sought
- Expanded topics, including Nature and Science, Natural Features and Ecosystems, a section for Teachers to plan field trips and obtain curriculum materials, a Just for Kids section with direct links to Web Rangers, News, Management Policies, Park Statistics, Jobs, Fire Management, Volunteer opportunities, and Frequently Asked Questions will be added to each park's site.
- Chickasaw NRA is seeking suggestions from the public regarding topics or links you wish to see on the new web site. Please visit the current site at: www.nps.gov/chic
- Cruise through our current site and give us suggestions, via the "contact us" link. While we may not get all the material up right away, it will give us targets for an expanded and more useful web visit in the future.
- By September, you can check out the Visitor Survey conducted last summer on the website. It gives some interesting insights into where visitors come from, what they need while visiting, and what the park service **and** the community can provide to keep them coming back.

While you are looking at the Chickasaw web site, punch the "back" button and cruise through the national site at www.nps.gov. There are links there to national policy, current news, and hot topics. It helps fit Chickasaw NRA into the picture as a nationally significant area, treasured by all Americans.

For further information, contact the park at: 580/622-3161.

Comments and questions can be directed to Superintendent Connie Rudd at chic_superintendent@nps.gov or call 580/622-3161. If you would like to receive electronically, please send email to above address.